

ORM NEWS

Office of Resolution Management
Department of Veterans Affairs

www.va.gov/orm



**"Honoring and Serving our Nation's Veterans by Promoting
Discrimination-free Environments"**

May 2005

From the Deputy Assistant Secretary



"Quality is Job 1"

I want to talk about an issue of paramount importance to us as an organization that adds value to VA. It's the quality of our work. Quality can be defined as a "degree of excellence." While we have made great progress in meeting EEOC timeliness requirements for counseling, investigations, and procedural determinations, we must also focus on the quality of our work.

Our goal is to have a stellar reputation based on a history of high quality and timely service delivered cost effectively. Our primary internal stakeholders (aggrieved, responding management officials, EEO managers, facility directors, Office of General Counsel, and the Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication) must see that we provide high quality services. If the perception is not positive, our reputation suffers.

How we are perceived is in the hands of each of us. We must take individual and collective responsibility for ORM's quality. I want each of us to take the following test as we carry out your responsibilities: "If I or my family were receiving this service, would I rate it as highly satisfactory or outstanding? If the answer isn't "yes," we should be trying to improve what we are doing."

We have heard the slogan, "Quality is Job 1." We can borrow that. Howard W. Newton had this to say about quality, "People forget how fast you did a job – but they remember how well you did it." We can move ORM to the next level, build upon our accomplishments, and meet the challenges ahead of us by understanding the importance in delivering "quality" services to our stakeholders and each other. That's the foundation of our reputation.

James S. Jones

In this issue...

- 1** Quality is "Job 1"
- 2** Root Cause Data
- 3** Writing for Your Readers
- 3** VA Cited for Third Highest ADR Resolution Rate in FY 2004
- 4** Executive Mediation Training
- 5** Travel Tips
- 6** Office Notes
- 7** Did You Know?

**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Memorandum

Date: **APR 29 2005**

From: Deputy Assistant Secretary for Resolution Management (08)

Subj: Root Cause Data

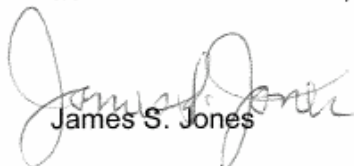
To: ORM Counselors, Counselor Team Leaders, Field Managers

1. Root Cause identification is rapidly becoming one of the more important tools used to help reduce the number of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaints. As you may know, last year more than 95% of the Department's EEO complaints when adjudicated did not result in a finding of discrimination. There are a significant number of instances where workplace disputes could have been addressed, and possibly resolved, in a more appropriate forum. To that end, the Office of Resolution Management (ORM) is committed to providing facilities with root cause data specific to their organizations in an effort to help them identify deficiencies and develop interventions designed to address the underlying causes of workplace disputes to reduce complaints and grievances.

2. As EEO Counselors, your role in identifying and inputting appropriate root cause data into the Web-Based Tracking System (WBTS) is crucial. Near the end of fiscal year 2004, the Office of Policy and Compliance, in conjunction with the National Center for Organizational Development, and with your help, revised the root cause categories in the WBTS to better assist you in making an accurate root cause determination. Since that time, you have done an excellent job identifying and selecting root causes for the cases you have been assigned.

3. As a reminder, all counselors are to make an appropriate root cause selection no later than the day the Notice of Right to File a Formal Complaint is issued. A review of the WBTS shows that 85% of the cases counseled since November 2004, included a root cause entry. This is an impressive percentage, but it still highlights the fact that some counselors are not recording root cause data for their cases. It is important that each counselor make timely and appropriate root cause selections. The importance of this should not be underestimated.

4. If you have any questions concerning root cause data, please contact Earnestine Richardson, Root Cause Project Manager at 202-501-2691.



James S. Jones

Writing for Your Readers

Charlene Jones, Learning Resources



Have you considered what adds credibility to your writing, whether it is an email, a counselor report, an investigator report, or a procedural review? The VALU online course, *Writing to Reach Your Audience*, provides answers on how to make documents more credible using appropriate specific details, supporting evidence, and familiar language. When your document is easier to read, it becomes more believable.

This online course provides many examples of “how to” and “how not to” write. Regarding writing tone, ask yourself, am I writing in a confident manner? Do I write, “I think I can get it to you by tomorrow” or do I write, “I will get it to you tomorrow.”

Avoid the use of judgmental language; ask yourself, “Am I writing biased-free language in my reports” such as the police officer (not policeman) will be interviewed next week. Biased-free language shows respect for your reader and provides the opportunity for positive reader response.

Finally, this course reviews the three parts of the paragraph plus demonstrates how to organize your content in the writing process. One method discussed was called the “Ministerial 3.”

“They tell you what they are going to tell you.”

“They tell you.”

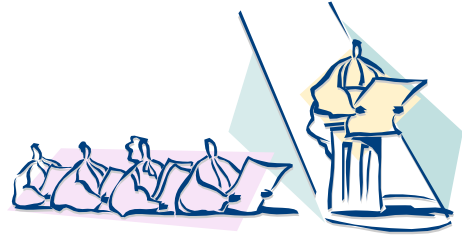
“They tell you what they told you.”

This 3-hour course is for anyone who wants to write from the reader’s point of view and translate information into clear communication. For more information, call Learning Resources at 727-319-1243.

VA Cited for Third Highest ADR Resolution Rate in FY 2004

VA was cited in EEOC’s “Annual Report on the Federal Work Force Fiscal Year 2004” as having the third highest alternative dispute resolution rate (79.2 percent) in fiscal year 2004. This is 49 percent higher than the government-wide average of 48.7 percent. To view the entire EEOC report, go to <http://www.eeoc.gov/federal/fsp2004/index.html>.

Executive Mediation Training



ORM recently conducted its 18th “Executive Mediation Session” training in Atlanta, GA. The training was held in Atlanta, Georgia, March 29 – April 1, 2005. The Justice Center of Atlanta (JCA), one of the Nation's top mediation trainers, conducted the training. There were 24 VA senior executives and SES candidates in attendance. This training is part of ORM's ADR initiatives to encourage the use of ADR to resolve work place disputes throughout VA.

This training was rated as “Excellent” by 100% of the participants.

Participants had this to say about the program:

- *“Excellent program overall—highlighted advantages of mediation. All trainers were superb!”*
- *“Excellent workshop”*
- *“All instructors were excellent; well prepared and knowledgeable”*
- *“I will tell others about this outstanding course”*
- *“Gave me a new viewpoint on mediation”*
- *“Program was an excellent overall experience”*

The Executive Mediation Session is a 20-hour, three-day course that ensures participants are well versed in and supportive of mediation principles, which we believe will help foster the use of alternative dispute resolution and reduce discrimination complaint activity. The course is intensive, highly participatory, and designed to increase knowledge of the language of neutrality and resolution, as well as enhancing communication and negotiation skills. This course focuses on disputes that arise in the workplace, including EEO grievances; complaints concerning the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, (EEO matters); and grievances of federal sector employees who must implement 29 CFR Part 1614.

Executive Mediation Training is one several Alternative Dispute Resolution training programs sponsored by ORM. For more information on ORM sponsored training, visit our Web site <http://vaww.va.gov/orm/adr.htm>.

Lewis Henson, ORM Training Officer, and the staff of Learning Resources are to be commended for this excellent training program.

Travel Tips

Barbara Scott, ORM Budget Office



Travel Plans & Expense Reports

To help expedite the processing of your travel plans and expense reports, it's important to follow these instructions:

Purpose of Travel: When you have made a selection from the Zegato drop down menu, please state in the "comments section" the reason for your travel, (i.e., name of conference, purpose for site visit (to meet with Director regarding...) etc.

Miscellaneous Expenses: If you have entered an amount in the miscellaneous expense column, please clarify in the "comments section" what the expenses are for.

Submitting Travel Plans and Expense Reports: All approved travel plans and expense reports are to be either faxed (202-501-2215/2885) or scanned and sent electronically to ORM Budget Staff.

For more information contact Barbara Scott at (202) 501-2817.

Travel Transaction Fees

- Have you wondered lately why you are only charged an \$11 transaction fee when you submit an approved travel plan/expense report or are you still being charged a \$21 transaction fee?
- Did you know that you can save time and \$ when you locate your contract flight using the "FedTravel" Web site www.fedtravel.com/gsa prior to doing your travel plan in Zegato?

If you know the time and flight prior to making your reservations in Zegato, there is no need to use the booking engine in Zegato which locates flights for you. You can use the FedTravel Web site to locate your flight information and then enter it into Zegato.

FSC recently announced that Zegato released enhancements include an \$11 transaction fee for travel episodes not using the booking engine. Prior to this, a \$21 transaction fee was charged whether you used the Zegato online booking engine or not. This may be temporary situation since the E-travel Help Desk is researching and testing the new enhancements. But for now, this is a savings of \$10 per travel episode.

For more information contact Barbara Scott at (202) 501-2817.

Office Notes



Government Service Recognition

Peggy Joyner, Quality Assurance Manager, DAS Staff – 30 Years
Barbara Scott, Program Analyst, DAS Staff – 30 Years

New Employees

Yolanda Ali joined Northeastern Operations (Lyon Field Office) on April 3, 2005 as an EEO Assistant. We want to welcome Yolanda as one of the latest members of the ORM family.

Thank You

Vanessa Vaughn of IT would like to personally “thank” **Gina Suppa**, with Policy and Compliance, for her invaluable help in creating an electronic hyperlink for the latest version of the ORM Telephone Directory.

Western Operations

For the past few years, **Deo Engles**, EEO Counselor, has been taking a week’s annual leave to donate his time to the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinics. This year marked the 19th anniversary of this event which was held April 3, 2005, through April 8, 2005, in Snowmass, Colorado. Deo said his participation as a volunteer at this event is his way of saying “thank you” to the disabled veteran participants for their service to our Nation. For more information on National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinics, go to <http://www1.va.gov/vetevent/wsc/2005/default.cfm>.

Professional Assistants Day Activities

- Deputy Assistant Secretary Jones, and his staff, extended their thanks to the Administrative Assistants for their hard work and dedication to the efficient operation of the DAS’ office in recognition of “Professional Assistants Day.” A luncheon was held at a local hotel, as well as an in-office celebration where they were presented with thank-you cards, a cake and flowers.
- Great Lakes Operations – It was with great pleasure that the staff recognized the Program Assistants on Wednesday, April 27th by providing lunch and gifts in appreciation of their hard work. Each office (Hines/Cleveland) ordered lunch and met in the conference rooms as a group to celebrate this day. Again thanks for a great job.

Did You Know?

Dependent Care Flexible Spending Accounts Puts Money Back in Your Pocket!

The *Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account (DCFSA)* is an attractive benefit for employees who pay for child care. Many eligible employees are not yet taking advantage of this benefit and may be unaware that this account offers a significant tax advantage.

DCFSA's allow you to pay for eligible child care costs up to \$5,000 annually, for qualified dependents while you or your spouse work, look for work, or attend school full-time. With DCFSA's, you are paying out-of-pocket expenses with pre-taxed dollars. DCFSA's put money back in your pocket since money is deducted from your paycheck before taxes are taken out by your agency saving you 20% to 40% or more.

It is important to remember that the Internal Revenue Service limits a single household to no more than \$5,000 in child care deductions annually. This includes any assistance that you may be receiving in child care subsidies.

For information on DCFSA's, visit the Web site at <https://www.fsafeds.com/fsafeds/index.asp>.



HealthierFeds

HealthierFeds is an initiative that places emphasis on educating Federal employees and retirees on healthy living strategies. By encouraging positive behaviors regarding physical activity, nutrition, preventive screenings and healthy lifestyle choices, the hope is to reduce demand on the health care system. By providing accurate, reliable and safe information in these subject areas, HealthierFeds serves as a resource for federal employees to live healthier lives.

For more information, please visit the HealthierFeds Web site at <http://www.opm.gov/healthierfeds/>.

Source is the Office of Personnel Management



Take a Time Out from Stress

Tips for Stress Management

While stress is a natural part of life, it is important to appropriately manage it in order to reduce negative health impacts.

Mismanaged stress can lead to chronic fatigue, body aches, change in appetite, and increased use of alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes.

The following tips are ways to help manage stress and reduce its negative effects on your life:

- Exercise regularly, such as a half hour every day. Be sure to check with your doctor first before changing exercise habits.
- Get an adequate amount of sleep every night, between 6 to 10 hours.
- Use humor and a positive attitude to overcome negative thoughts.
- Drink plenty of water, between 4 to 8 glasses a day.
- Take time out for yourself to do something you enjoy.
- Contact your personal physician for more information on stress management.

Source is "VA Offers Tips for Stress Management"

MEMORIAL DAY

May 30, 2005

More than 41 million men and women have served in the Armed Forces of this country and over a million have died defending it. On Memorial Day we pause to remember those who have made the ultimate sacrifice so that we can remain free.

National Moment of Remembrance



Along with other Americans, you are asked to spend *A Moment of Remembrance* on Memorial Day, Monday, May 30, 2005, at 3:00 p.m. local time (duration: one minute). The time 3:00 p.m. was chosen because it is the time when many Americans are enjoying their freedoms on the national holiday. The *Moment* does not replace the traditional Memorial Day observances. It is intended to be a unifying act of remembrance for Americans of all ages.

ORM NEWS is a monthly publication of the Office of Resolution Management. Contact Terry Washington, External Affairs Program, by e-mail or by calling (202) 501-2800 concerning the content of this newsletter. Back copies of this newsletter can be found on our Web site www.va.gov/orm